

INTRODUCTION

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a real pleasure to welcome all of you, the guests and the participants of an International Conference entitled *Towards a New Renaissance: Values, Spirituality and the Future* to the Jagiellonian University. I am very glad that you have decided to organize such an important discussion and even more glad that the discussion takes place at the Jagiellonian University.

Ladies and Gentleman,

One could ask; why do we need a “New Renaissance”? To answer that question one should analyze our current life. We are quite privileged to live in such an interesting, in many aspects, period of time. The end of twentieth century and the beginning of twenty first century brought about a lot of dramatic changes; the number of great discoveries, followed by technological revolution, the major political and economical changes. That resulted in dramatic changes in both; material and intellectual dimensions of existence of human-beings. The complicated industrial processes became much faster and much easier. The improvement in land cultivation and agriculture resulted in dramatic increase in food production. New medical technologies and procedures provide support and improvement of quality of life on the scale which has been unimaginable before. Man conquered the Cosmos, landed on the Moon and travels to the other planets. New information technologies brought about simplified methods of global communication, information storage and almost instant access to its resources.

Thus, one could expect that we all should only benefit from these. Unfortunately, we know that this is not exactly true. A number of local conflicts, acts of terror and two recent major wars demonstrated the failure of humanity. They demonstrated also the failure of the philosophy of construction of the world by simple and fast adoption of all the discoveries available for some of us. First of all, the spatial and social distribution of these “goods” is extremely uneven. Secondly, there is lack of harmony

between development of the material basis of our existence and the spiritual dimension of our being.

At the beginning of the twenty first century one must realize that the new discoveries bring a lot of benefits but also a lot of challenges. Hence one must stop and reflect on that. One must define a new set of values. One must create the new base for common culture; the base which will be centered around human-being and will be rooted in tradition and respect for universal values. That is why we need the New Renaissance.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me ensure you that you have chosen the best possible venue for your conference. We are gathered in Collegium Maius of the Jagiellonian University. This place is the first seat of the University and it is still its real heart and soul. That medieval university was blooming during the Renaissance. The activities of that University were essential for the development and shape of the Renaissance in Poland and still have consequences in our times. That was the climate of Renaissance; freedom of thinking and freedom of discussions which resulted in development of sciences. These served as a magnet which attracted here the great scientists and great students, individuals who wanted to discover and to learn. Among the most valuable fruits of that period of time was the discovery made by Copernicus who was a student here (1491–1495). It is believed that it was during his studies in Kraków that he realized that the traditional astronomy required basic reforms.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I wish you a fruitful conference; both scientifically and socially. Please enjoy your stay at the Jagiellonian University and in our city.

Maria Nowakowska
Vice-rector of the Jagiellonian University